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ABSTRACT

Information about alternative education as a baseline of thought for school reorganization is presented in this document. Chapter 1 describes the perspectives of alternative education and identifies common types. Teaching methods, strategies, and beliefs of alternative education are discussed in chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on the structural arrangements of alternative education, such as the necessary components for change and program building and factors for success or failure. The final chapter reviews research on alternative schools, presents student attitudes, and offers information on the cost of dropping out of school. Two figures are included. Appendices list nationwide organizations and resources. (Contains 34 references.) (LMI)

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The National Dropout Prevention Center is a partnership between an organization of concerned leaders–representing business, educational and policy interests and Clemson University, created to significantly reduce America's dropout rate by fostering public-private partnerships in local school districts and communities throughout the nation. The Center cultivates these partnerships by collecting, analyzing and disseminating information about dropout prevention policies and practices; and by providing technical assistance to develop and demonstrate dropout prevention programs.

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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IOWA DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION

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About the Author

Dr. Raymond Morley is a consultant in the Iowa Department of Education. His present responsibilities include education of homeless children and youth, dropout prevention programs and services, school-based youth services programs as well as K-14 programs and services for at-risk youth. He has been involved with alternative education programs in Iowa for nearly 20 years.

Dr. Morley has been instrumental in the creation of the International Affiliation of Alternative School Associations and Personnel. He is a permanent ex-officio member of the Executive Board of the Iowa Association of Alternative Education and has been recognized for his outstanding contributions to alternative education and education in general in Iowa.

Preface

We live in a world of rapid change, with opportunities unparalleled throughout history for educational advancement. Yet each year approximately one million students drop out of our traditional school system—a system provided at considerable community expense. Fortunately, there are other options for some of these students to continue their education and secure a high school diploma or equivalent which increases the chances for success both in the workplace and throughout life.

The choice offered to these students at risk is alternative education. Although the author defines and describes various aspects of alternative education, he emphasizes the point that alternative education is more of a "perspective" than a program. It is this belief in a different way of educating students that has fostered the growth of alternative education in the American education system. This changing perspective will likely encourage even greater growth as schools search for "alternatives" and successful models for restructuring.

For those reasons, the National Dropout Prevention Center invited Dr. Raymond Morley, a national and state leader in the Alternative Education Movement, to review the topic, share a view of what is working in our communities and to offer suggestions about alternative education. We know from the general literature on effective programs that these special students need a sense of community or bonding, and need a consistent advocate and caring adult. Alternative education has been successful because these key elements are present in the philosophy and foundations of those programs presently in operation throughout America.

If you are a member of the education family, this publication will help guide your thoughts about a different approach to educate students who are not successful in traditional schools. We also invite civic and community leaders to respond to the specific needs of unique students in their communities. We challenge everyone to join in the effort to educate all children. Restructuring in the 90s will change our traditional schooling procedures. The alternative education movement has already initiated some of those changes. We hope that this document will provide suggestions to continually improve our schools. We appreciate and applaud the efforts of Ray Morley and other educators who are attempting to help students at risk.

—Jay Smink, Executive Director,
National Dropout Prevention Center

Chapter One

Teachers, counselors, administrators, other school personnel, and support services agency personnel are normally not familiar with nor trained in alternative education. Few colleges offer courses to train people in the basic beliefs and practices behind the concept. Most educators who involve themselves in the process of implementing alternative education learn it through practice and sharing with other alternative educators. The sharing that has occurred has kept alternative education alive which continues to benefit students.

The information presented in this publication defines alternative education and presents it as a baseline of thought for school reorganization. The structural characteristics and benefits of alternative education are identified in addition to major resources to assist in planning and implementation. The content represents messages from alternative educators and serves to continue the sharing necessary to assure its growth and development. The information is intended to be helpful to support service agency personnel, parents and other interested or involved community members as well as educators.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION is a means of ensuring that every young person may find a path to the educational goals of the community.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION is a means of accommodating our cultural plurism making available a multitude of options.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION is a means of providing choices to enable each person to succeed and be productive.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION is a means of recognizing the strengths and values of each individual by seeking and providing the best available options for all students.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION is a sign of excellence in any public school system and community.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION is a means for addressing the transformation of our schools.

General Perspectives

Alternative methods of providing education and the theoretical bases utilized by alternative educators within public education today have existed for more than 200 years and grew from contributions of many people from different countries (Avrich,1980). Alternatives within public education have been documented since our country's beginning (Young, 1990). Therefore, they are not new to education. The word "alternatives" has been used continuously as education has developed.

The inspiration for developing alternative programs and schools primarily resulted from the needs and concerns of individuals and communities with varying emphasis for the very talented to the high school dropout. Especially strong movements to develop alternative schools and programs in this country originated during the 1960s and 70s in partial response to civil rights issues and the emphasis on values in education and individualization (Young, 1990). Alternative schools and programs penetrated so deeply into the American system of education that the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools developed "Policies and Standards for the Accreditation of Optional Schools and Special Function Schools" in 1974. The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools recognized the concept of choice at work in redeeming American education to the fullest education of every child and the need for standards to ensure quality in alternative schools and programs.

Strong federal financial incentives have neither spurred nor dictated the development of alternatives across public education. However, over the past decade, alternatives within public education have been encouraged via national reports and major education organizations throughout this country (National Governor's Association, 1988; National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1986). The concerns in the 1980s on dropout rates and at-risk children and youth have led to identifying alternative schools and programs as potential solutions to help curb the problem (Wehlage, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

A primary goal of initiating alternatives within communities has been to provide every parent and child with choices to obtain the best possible education available that works for the child. The ultimate goal of alternative schools and programs continues to be to assist individuals to become as productive as possible upon entering the community as independent contributors. Since children learn in many

different ways and on different time schedules, alternatives within education provide a natural perspective for designing learning environments to meet different learning needs and styles. Therefore, alternatives within education provide an excellent perspective for use in school restructuring (Colorado Strategic Options Initiative, 1989).

The National Education Association has developed policy statements recognizing the need for alternatives for dropouts, potential dropouts and other students who need assistance to succeed (National Education Association, 1989). It also recognizes the need to adjust services for other students such as the talented and gifted and the need to address the diversity of student learning styles. These policy statements are in agreement with the urban superintendents' call to action titled "Dealing With Dropouts" (U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

The publication encourages communities to mobilize to assist youngsters to become successful and productive individuals and competent future leaders. A major recommendation made by the superintendents is to "provide a broad range of instructional programs" including schools of choice and alternative schools. The National Education Association and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education have identified seven principles on how to approach the development of alternatives for dropout prevention in a publication entitled "Blueprint for Success" (National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1986). The seven principles are consistent with suggestions being made in school restructuring initiatives to improve education for all students.

What Is Alternative Education?

Alternative education is a perspective, not a procedure or program. It is based upon the belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this may occur. Further, it recognizes that all people can be educated and that it is in society's interest to ensure that all are educated to at least something like an ideal, general high school education at the mastery level. To accomplish this requires that we provide a variety of structures and environments such that each person can find one that is sufficiently comfortable to facilitate progress (Fizzell, 1990).

Alternative education is recognizing that everyone does not learn in the same way and should not be taught in the same way using a common curriculum. It is accepting that all schools do not have to be

alike with the same learning environments and that parents and children are capable of making decisions about what and how they learn. Consequently, it is a means of incorporating variety and choice within school systems to "ensure that every young person may find a path to the educational goals of the community" (Iowa Association of Alternative Schools, 1990).

Alternative education is represented by: (a) alternative schools, both public and private; (b) alternative programs for students to pursue common goals through varying approaches within the same schools; and (c) a set of teaching strategies, beliefs and support services that facilitate growth in academic, personal/social and career development initiatives.

Common Types of Alternative Schools And Programs

Continuation Schools: provide an option for dropouts, potential dropouts, pregnant students and teenage parents. These are designed to provide a less competitive, more individualized approach to learning. Programs vary, but usually include individualized learning plans that accommodate support services, personal responsibility for attendance and progress, nongraded or continuous progress, and personal/social development experiences. Definitions vary between states but continuation schools constitute a large majority of alternative schools in existence (Young, 1990, page 15). Metro in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is a nationally recognized school of excellence and is an excellent continuation school model. The Greater Des Moines Education Centers are also excellent models along with Kanesville Alternative School in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Fundamental Schools: provide a back-to-the-basics curriculum and teacher-directed instruction with strict discipline. Ability grouping is practiced, letter grades are given, a dress code is usually established and homework is required. The magnitude of fundamental schools is not known, but they represent a popular alternative in public education for those wanting strict discipline and strong emphasis on academic learning. Phillips Elementary School in Des Moines, Iowa, is a working model of this approach and maintains a waiting list which verifies the public's demand for this type of approach in schools.

Schools Within A School (SWS): an option developed primarily at the secondary level to reduce the size and numbers of large comprehensive high schools into more manageable and humane units. The most ambitious and best known of these was established in Quincy, Illinois, in 1972 which resulted in 7 schools within a school. Learning Unlimited (LU) in Indianapolis, Indiana, is a school of 250 located in North Central High School housing 3,200 students. It now represents an exemplary SWS.

Schools Without Walls: offer a program of community-based learning experiences and incorporate community resource people as instructors. The Philadelphia Pennsylvania Parkway Program is the oldest and best known School Without Walls program and is located in four units within the city. None of the units exceeds 300 students, small size being a key to success.

Multicultural Schools: designed to serve students from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds with curricula that emphasize cultural pluralism. Course work in human relations and cultural practices and languages is common. Many of the schools serve a particular ethnic or racial group such as Black, Asian or Puerto Rican students. The Newcomer High School in San Francisco offers a transitional program for foreign-born 14 to 17 year olds with limited knowledge of English and serves as an example of a multicultural school. The Dallas Independent School District offers a multicultural program called High Intensity Language Training (HILT) in 28 secondary schools and has markedly decreased attrition rates among Hispanic students. The Dallas program serves as an excellent example applying the multicultural concept to many high schools in one district.

Learning Centers: provide special resources and programs concentrated in one location. Most centers at the secondary level are vocational or technical in nature and include career awareness and preparation. Many contain special academic preparation for entry into occupations or vocational training and offer options such as study skills training. Elementary centers typically offer high-interest enrichment programs to attract students for part of a day. Vocational Village in Portland, Oregon is a superlative example of the secondary learning center concept. Central

Campus in Des Moines, Iowa, and the Career Center in Council Bluffs, Iowa, also serve as excellent models. Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, offers high school completion programs for over 120 school districts in Iowa via learning centers and correspondence programming. Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny, Iowa, is presently establishing learning centers to serve more than one district and to accommodate small rural schools who cannot afford to operate independent programs. The "Basics and Beyond" learning center in Newton serves six other school districts and remains a satellite of the Des Moines Area Community College serving dropouts, potential dropouts, and other populations wanting to pursue new training challenges.

Magnet Schools: evolved as a response to school desegregation and were developed to provide distinctive programs of study to attract students from all racial groups within a school district. Magnets concentrate resources in one location and usually feature a theme or area of emphasis. Special schools in academics, arts, and technical fields have been developed mostly at the elementary level. Two of the most famous schools at the elementary level are the Environmental Education Program at Blandford School and John Balk Zoo School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Other good examples are Edmonds School in Des Moines, Iowa, featuring the fine arts, and Perkins and King Elementary School in Des Moines featuring the sciences.

[**NOTE:** The above classifications and some of the interpretations were taken from "Public Alternative Education" by Timothy Young.]

Other Classifications

The California Department of Education has recognized that alternatives can be organized and identified many ways. It has developed a chart (found on page 13) of the many different alternatives/options it recognizes in education. The alternatives are identified as schools, programs or instructional techniques/strategies. Each category is then identified as being (M) mandated, (L) a limited option, meaning that some restrictions apply, or as (O) optional

meaning it may be chosen by parent or student. The chart is unique in that it also classifies the alternatives as curriculum-based, form or structure-based or student need-based. It is presented here as an example of the multitude of alternatives that are possible and that extend beyond those general classifications of alternatives defined above.

Timothy Young (1990) in "Public Alternative Education" provides several categorizations of alternatives including private nonpublic systems such as "free schools" which developed throughout the 1960s. Colorado Options in Education (1989) also offers a publication titled "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Starting a Public Alternative School and More." A variety of alternatives are identified and defined within the publication. Lastly, Ronald Garrison (1987) in "Alternative Schools for Disruptive Youth" offers a classification of alternative schools for disruptive youth including campus programs, community programs, correctional, intervention, separate facility schools and schools within schools.

CHART OF SELECTED INDICATIVE ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS IN EDUCATION IDENTIFICATION/CLASSIFICATION

(M)—Mandated and required for students with certain specified characteristics
(L)—Limited option, i.e., some restrictions apply
(O)—Optional or voluntary, e.g., it may be chosen by parent and/or student and by teacher

Curriculum-Based

Schools	Programs	Instructional Techniques/Strategies
1. Specialized school (O)	30. Magnet program (L)	60. Outreach activities (O)
2. Magnet school (L)	31. Career education/ vocational programs (O)	61. Experience-based learning (O)
3. Academic/college prep (O)	32. Advanced Placement (O)	
4. Community-based school (O)	33. Work experience/internship (O)	
5. Fundamental/structured school (O)		

Form or Structure-Based

11. Comprehensive school (L)	40. Regional Occupational Program (L)	70. School/class learning center (O)
12. Year-round school (O)	41. Summer School: Remediation "CORE" Proficiency Program (L)	71. Teacher/peer tutoring (O)
13. K-12/multigrade school (O)		72. Home schooling (O)
14. School without walls (O)		73. Flexible scheduling (O)
15. School-within-a-school (O)		

Student Need-Based

20. Multicultural or ethnic center (O)	50. Opportunity program (L)	80. Independent study (O)
21. Opportunity school (L)	51. Gifted and talented education (L)	81. GED prep (O)
22. Continuation school (M)	52. Special education (M)	82. Intensive guidance (M)
23. Alternative school (O)	53. Migrant education (M)	83. Tenth grade counseling (M)
24. County community school (L)	54. Compensatory education (M)	84. Learning style-based (O)
25. Court school (M)	55. Bilingual education (M)	85. Student-parent education (O)
26. Open school (O)	56. Teenage pregnancy and maternity program (O)	86. Job development and placement (L)
27. Adult school (O)	57. Competency-based (L)	87. Counseling-based (O)
28. Adult corrections (L)	58. Adult basic education (L)	88. Open entry-open exit (L)

**Chart provided by Lynn Hartzler, Department of Education, California. The numbering as it appears here is not sequentially continuous but represents specific identification numbers used by California to administer programs.*

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Chapter Two

Teaching Methods, Strategies and Beliefs

The *heart* of alternative education is the teacher (Morley, 1985-86; Pariser, 1990; Gregory and Smith, 1987). The teacher creates a place in which students can learn. Students involved in alternative education schools and programs indicate that the most important characteristic of teachers is that they care for students. The most powerful influence on students to stay in school is *friendly attention*. As well, a primary characteristic of successful alternative programs is a *supportive atmosphere* -- caring and being concerned about the individual (Pariser, 1990).

Emanuel Pariser, Co-Director of the Community School in Camden, Maine, and alternative educator for 17 years, speaks of Intimacy, Connectedness and Education which he feels are critical within alternative education. He feels that students who fail within our conventional system develop a lack of trust (in adults and themselves), need to belong, develop addictive and compulsive behavior because of background and environmental circumstances and enter into and remain in a failure cycle. We have no choice but to concern ourselves with these issues in alternative education programs that serve dropouts and prevent dropouts. Pariser (1990) identifies success with students as a direct result of a learning environment which provides an experience of intimacy and connectedness—a sense of emotional closeness between two or more people.

The most often mentioned beliefs and teaching strategies by alternative educators are also those advocated by libertarians and documented in "The Modern School Movement" by Paul Avrich, 1980. Some of the most common ideas include:

Beliefs

Success is not what it is supposed to be all about, but rather what kind of people we are and what we can contribute to society.

The measure of a person's worth is what the person is and not totally what degrees he/she has earned.

Self-reliance and self-realization.

Emphasis on the process of learning.

Education is life itself—the community must be involved and be a ground for learning and applying learning.

Allow for students' own needs to learn certain subject material. Allow learning to be more natural, meaningful and pleasant.

The role of teacher is to encourage and suggest, not indoctrinate. The teacher should stimulate pupils to think and act for themselves.

Stimulate "unconscious education" by building an environment allowing education to occur naturally—without full awareness it is happening.

Attendance and work are the responsibility of the student.

Noise is the natural order of things to be expected to a certain extent.

Treating a child with respect establishes a relationship of confidence and reciprocity in which the teacher might learn as much from the pupil as the pupil does from the teacher.

The teacher must "primarily be a person" not a teacher.

The teacher must be a friend rather than a master.

The teacher must be an infinitely patient collaborator.

The personality and moral character of the teacher count most.

The role of the teacher rests heavily on being sensitive and responding to the needs of each child—this does not come easily and must be worked on.

Education is a continuous process extending from cradle to grave; therefore transition steps into adulthood are necessary.

Methods

Active methods of learning.

Pupil participation in decision making.

Informal relations between teachers and students.

Cultivation of manual skills.

Creative development.

Individual study.

Teaching by example.

Emphasize reason and understanding over rote memorization.

Stress the rights and dignity of children.

Encourage warmth, love, and affection.

Emphasize scientific thought and reasoning.

Emphasize respect for humanity.

Encourage self-learning.

Allow students to develop their own way—adjust timelines for support services and reaching goals.

Emphasize improvisation and experiment over predetermined curriculum.

Self-discipline is encouraged.

Beliefs and Methods

All children pass through certain stages of development meaning different skills have to be learned at different periods depending on the child.

Action is the groundwork of education. Teach by things rather than words—learn by doing and experience to make education practical.

Vocational education will include a variety of different types of work which will ensure that each student becomes an all around learner.

Parents must take part in the education of their children.

The ideas previously mentioned are commonly expressed in one form or other by today's alternative educators to emphasize why alternatives are effective. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but reflects ideas drawn from the thinking of educators across time who were concerned about conventional schools and the degree to which they failed to meet the needs of all students. **The libertarian thoughts make a revolutionary departure from education method by emphasizing the desire of the pupil rather than the will of the instructor as the motive element in learning** (Avrich, 1980). This single idea characterizes perhaps the most powerful reason why alternatives are effective in reaching potential dropouts and dropouts from conventional schools.

Joe Nathan (1983), in his book *Free To Teach*, addresses public education and provides concrete examples to help our most troubled students to succeed. He draws upon his experiences as an alternative educator and educator in general, as well as those of others in providing suggestions for the complete public school of today (Nathan, 1983). His ideas, in part, lead us to the restructuring initiatives of present day discussions on education.

The beliefs, methodologies and characteristics within alternative education are undoubtedly common to major considerations in the national arguments and movements to restructure public education. Major concerns such as: the need for strategic options, the caring and engagement of learners, principles of learning, the support of teachers to be free to teach, etc., are also major concerns of alternative educators. Research within alternative education and specifically with dropout and dropout prevention programs indicates that the way education is approached can make a difference (Raywid, 1989). Alternatives and options do help students to succeed and appear to have great promise as being a major baseline for establishing public school restructuring plans. Given the debate and disagreement over "choice," perhaps "alternatives" can be a more palatable word for use in local planning initiatives and can be used when a substitute word is needed for "choice."

Interestingly enough one has to ask the question "will alternatives and options become institutionalized enough to constitute what we call public school?" Is there really any other way? We will attempt to answer these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

In Colorado, Arnie Langberg, Director of Alternative Education for Denver Public Schools, is attempting to bridge the gap bringing alternatives into the school restructuring plans. Langberg suggests two elements essential for transformation—smaller units of manageable size and each student having at least one adult who is an advocate (Wheelock and Sweeney, 1989). Raymond Morley and others have identified more than 50 policies and practices in public schools that contribute to student failure and dropping out (Morley, 1989). These policies and practices have been put into a format to assist districts in analyzing their own schools while in the process of restructuring. Alternative policies and practices are identified within the inventory.

Joe Nathan (1989), in "Public Schools by Choice," projects our future in school transformation indicating that choice among public schools should be a central part of the next decade's reform efforts. "Expanding choice can help solve some of our key problems of American public education: low achievement by too many students, unacceptable dropout rates, low morale among educators, and parent dissatisfaction".

Seymour Fliegel, Gilder Senior Fellow at the Center for Educational Innovation and former Director of Alternative Schools in New York City supports choice. "With choice," he says, "youngsters understand that you are interested in what they are interested in" (Brandt, 1990-91). Seymour created a districtwide free choice plan and a nationally recognized network of 24 alternative concept schools, and he believes we can create alternatives in small rural schools/districts as well as large districts *if we want to*.

Structure

Four commonly mentioned structural characteristics of alternative programs which makes them effective are:

Smallness: Small is better. Smallness is necessary to establish and maintain a sense of family and belonging or a sense of community. Tom Gregory and Gerald Smith (1990), in "High Schools as Communities: The Small School Reconsidered," argue for smaller-size schools among other factors as a consideration for restructuring our schools across the board. A small alternative school in Colorado (Mountain Open High School) is used by Gregory and Smith as a model example of their concern for a sense of community.

Concern for the Whole Student: Personal attention is the key to student success in alternative schools. Small size, the expectation of teachers to serve as counselors and get involved in the problems of students, and the goals of establishing a family environment are three main ingredients in the environments of alternative schools that make them emotionally supportive for students. These characteristics are also consistent with recommendations made by William Glasser (1986, 1990) in: "Control Theory in the Classroom" and "The Quality School," Ron Miller (1990) in "What are Schools For: Holistic Education in American Culture" as well as many others presently involved in the school restructuring within our country.

Supportive Environment: Students in alternative schools indicate that they have a space that is **theirs**. Many of the environments are more like home than the conventional school. Teacher-student relationships are established for one-on-one experiences with teachers being advisors and groups are organized to develop belonging, peer acceptance, and relationships. Support services from outside of education are made part of and accommodated within a student's schedule.

Sense of Community: Many alternative schools speak of a sense of community indicating that the students and staff collaborate to make the school work. The staff and students establish some goals that they recognize, consider important, accept, and discuss in community meetings. The process of community meetings helps develop a sense of purpose and group support. Self-discipline is an example of a common goal recognized by staff and students. Students and staff share responsibility for building self-discipline and independence.

Ideas for success and failure for alternatives for marginal students and dropouts go beyond the four characteristics identified above and have been identified by Mary Ann Raywid at Hofstra University-Center for the Study of Educational Alternatives, Hempstead, New York. The content is based on input from 20 national leaders in the field. The components and considerations found on the following pages seem centrally important to successful programs.

Components of Change

- A concerted, continuous effort to generate a strong sense of student affiliation is critical. Alternatives for marginal students must be, in one writer's terms, "membership schools" which youngsters feel they have joined. Most of the students these programs must attract have rejected the impersonality of the comprehensive high school. Quite a different school climate is essential.

- Academically, the program must be planned so that it permits early and frequent success for students. Many of those involved have experienced repeated school difficulty, and strong doubts about their own capacities must be countered.

- The program must have clear and explicit goals which project its orientation and make plain just what it stands for. Only in this way can (a) youngsters knowledgeably choose the alternative, (b) its standards become public and shared, and (c) staff have access to consistent ready guidance in making daily decisions.

- An experiential learning component serves multiple functions and is centrally important. Some successful programs stress learning from observation, others insist on action learning such as volunteer service or paid work. All agree, however, that some form of experiential learning should be a substantial part in the programs of all students.

- A self-knowledge dimension is important in helping students arrive at fuller understanding of their own beliefs, capacities, and potential. Simultaneously, they need help to shift from a self-centered to a sociocentric perspective, and to experience themselves as responsible members of a group.

- Staff must be willing to undertake remedial work—but unwilling to make it a permanent compromise, or let students be content with mere remediation. Thus, the academic agenda must be developmental as well as substantive. Such expectations and efforts are essential to avoid tracking. They are also important in maintaining the self-esteem of students, and avoiding stigma from those outside of the program.

- An integrated curriculum drawing from several subject fields should be part of each student's program. (The integrating principle can be issues, themes, or problems; but it should serve to organize and present content other than simply by local progression through separate and connected disciplines.) Such an organization helps students use what they learn. It also helps them see the all-important connections between the person and a world that is public and shared.

Program Building

Building these components into a program will call for:

- Incorporating regularly scheduled "community-building" activities involving all of those in the program—in order to meld everyone into a genuine community.

- Efforts at adapting materials to individual needs—but along with considerable group work. Cooperative learning—strategies such as team learning and peer tutoring—are often particularly effective.

- Explicit, achievable academic goals. For low achievers, semesters—even grading periods—can stretch out as interminable and insurmountable. Broad long-term goals must be broken down into specific, short-range, obtainable sub-goals.

- Sets of short-term goals—in the form, for example, of individual competencies to be mastered, or "contracts" to be fulfilled, or unit obligations to be met.

- Detailed experiential learning arrangements—such as internships, service site development, observation plans—and a classroom follow-through adding a reflective component.

- Activities chosen to enhance self-esteem and to build the conviction that one can govern one's own future at least to some extent.

- A developmental program designed to cultivate abstract thinking ability—i.e., to foster intellectual growth—along with personal and social maturation.
- Activities chosen to cultivate self-direction and individual responsibility.
- A curriculum "core" of integrated studies jointly designed, chosen, or adapted by alternative school staff.

Alternatives for Success

Evidence to date suggests that each of the following features plays an important part in the success of an alternative school or program. The more of them associated with a program, the greater its chances for sustaining success.

- There is a fair degree of freedom from standard district operating procedures.
- Staff choose to be there, rather than being assigned.
- Students choose to be there, rather than being assigned.
- Existing staff have a strong voice in selecting new staff and students.
- The alternative represents a genuine, continuing educational option of its students, rather than a "beef-em-up-and-send-em-back operation."
- The program is designed by those who will operate it—its staff—and the staff are also in a position to modify it as conditions warrant.
- The program begins small—with perhaps fewer than 100 students—and a doubled enrollment remains the limit.
- The requisites of coherence and group identification are met: a separate space, and a substantial part of the school day spent together by the alternative's students and staff.

- The alternative school exerts high levels of control over the various features of its program.
- High levels of teacher autonomy are reflected.
- Secure programs may cost more than standard programs in the district in terms of per pupil expenses.
- The alternative begins with a two or three year commitment—with an evaluation planned to occur toward the end of that period.

Alternatives for Failure

Each of the following features reduces the likelihood of success of a new alternative. The more of them found in a program, the more remote its chances for yielding the benefits associated with alternative education.

- It is designed by administrators, not its staff.
- It is "imported" from somewhere else and set into operation pretty much intact, as it worked elsewhere.
- Most are referral programs to which students are assigned.
- The alternative is a "last chance" program which a student must "choose" in order to avoid suspension or expulsion.
- The program is punitive in orientation.
- The alternative is built around a single cluster of new elements—perhaps a new curriculum or a new set of activities—but holds all other features of school operation intact and unmodified.
- The alternative is treated just as any new department within the school—or new school within the district—might be. It is expected to conform to all existing regulations, operating procedures, and arrangements.

- Staff are assigned to the alternative by administrators outside it—or by automatic processes such as contract rights.

- The alternative is intended for the "toughest" cases—and designed to reflect the absolutely minimal departures from traditional school practice necessary to accommodate them.

- No one in the district is told very much about the new program and guidance counselors are left feeling lukewarm to negative about it.

[For more ideas on structure, contact the Center for Study of Educational Alternatives, Hofstra University, Hempstead, N.Y.]

Gary Wehlage, Robert Rutter, and others of the National Center for Effective Secondary Schools at the University of Wisconsin identified characteristics of school-within-a-school models of alternative programs and have classified them into four somewhat overlapping categories of administration, teacher culture, student culture and curriculum (Wheelock and Sweeney, 1989). They claim that the closer schools come to adapting all aspects of their model, the greater are the chances that students' self-esteem and attitudes will be affected positively.

Chapter Four

Research on Alternative Schools

Research on alternative schools is not comprehensive but does indicate positive results for some students that probably would not have occurred through conventional schooling. Some positive results indicate:

Increased attendance
Decreased dropouts
Decreased truancy
Fewer student behavior problems
Completion of high school program/increase in earned credits
Maintenance of academic achievement to increased achievement
High satisfaction of social needs, self-esteem, security and self-actualization
Positive attitudes toward school
Productivity in the community after graduation
Increased parent involvement

These as well as other results can be found in Timothy Young's book entitled "Public Alternative Education."

A recent survey (1990) of Iowa's alternative school graduates (dropouts who returned and graduated from an alternative school) by James Veale and others indicated very positive results regarding the productivity of alternative school graduates in the community. Eight measures of productivity were assessed including income generated via employment, postsecondary education/training, volunteer activity, participation in the political process, homemaking/child rearing, talents and skills not used on the job, public assistance involvement and penal system involvement. The study also assessed behaviors determined critical in competitive work. The results indicate that the financial investment in alternatives does benefit the state compared to other long term potential costs of dropouts and that alternative school graduates are productive citizens when assessed across all eight criteria used to define productivity.

Alternative school graduates are represented across all levels of employment, are not significantly more unemployed, do volunteer within the community, do participate in the voting process, are utilizing talents for avocational activities, are breaking out of public assistance, and are not overly represented in penal system activity.

This study of productivity is particularly impressive and supportive of alternatives when one considers the outlook for these dropouts for whom the conventional school completely failed at some point in their education. The following chart indicates cost factors indicative of dropping out.

The Costs of Dropping Out of School

Cost of Area	Magnitude of Cost	Studies
The loss of personal income and loss in state revenue	Loss of $170,000 to $340,000 personal income over a lifetime or reduction of at least 1/3 of potential income.	McDill, Natriello, and Pallas, 1987 Veale, 1990
	Loss of State revenue due to decreased tax payments because of lower wages. The loss is approximately 2.5 times what it would cost the state to educate students to the point of graduation.	Veale, 1990
The increase in welfare burden due to higher unemployment rates	The unemployment rate of dropouts is approximately double that of graduates resulting in increased welfare costs.	U.S. Bureau of Census, 1987
Increased risk of incarceration	Dropping out increases the chances of incarceration 3 to 9 times depending on the magnitude of dropping out and interaction with other social factors. Cost of incarceration is at least three times that of educating a student for a given year.	Veale, 1990
Deceleration in human growth and potential	Lower cognitive skill level, reduced options to economic progress, restricted social networks.	National Center for Educational Statistics, 1987 U. S. Department of Labor, 1989 Iowa Department of Education, 1990
Reduced sense of control over one's life	Projected external locus of control—feelings that things happen to them rather than them controlling their destiny (this affects all aspects of productive citizenship).	Wehlage & Rutter in Natriello (Ed.), 1987 Veale, 1990

A very vivid account of alternatives and their effects is provided in a documentary entitled "Why Do These Kids Love School?" by Dorothy Fadiman (1990). The hour long video culminates five years of research in public and private schools throughout this country by Fadiman and features alternative programs at the elementary and secondary level. The documentary captures the impact of alternatives through video and develops an impression that statistics and printed studies cannot convey. The film is available through Concentric Media, 1020 Colby Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

The evaluation of alternatives is exceedingly difficult to conduct and interpret when the diversity of students served and their needs vary so greatly. The true impact for each individual can sometimes only be captured through case studies and individual documentaries. Therefore, the following comments from students involved with alternative programs are offered as reminders to the reader to consider the individual in conducting evaluations.

Alternative Students Speak Out

The following comments reflect students' attitudes and feelings about traditional high schools versus alternative programs and are taken from actual interviews.

- Large high schools are frightening to people who aren't very popular and they feel self-conscious.
- At the ALC (Alternative Learning Center), students can work as fast as they like. Work is given at their own level. Classes are individualized.
- ALC is needed for girls who are pregnant. Sometimes in public schools students make fun of them. It is helpful for girls who are pregnant to go for a few hours a day rather than eight hours.
- Having three separate times for classes helps students who have jobs.
- Because classes are smaller, teachers have more time to spend with each individual student.
- Teachers let you know how you are doing nearly every week. Some students need encouragement.

The following is an excerpt from Metro High School (May, 1990) by David Williams.

When I arrived at Jefferson Senior High School, I felt important and I had goals. I was doing well until eleventh grade. It was in that year I started skipping a lot and my attendance started to fall. I hung out with the wrong crowd and was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Jefferson was history to me after my first term as a junior. My parents started to get tough with me about my failure at school and I had personal problems. I moved out of my dad's house, moved into my mom's, and enrolled at Washington High School. I didn't last too long at Washington either. Finally I came to Metro High School until the end of the year.

I became a senior and went back to Jefferson to start my senior year. That lasted until the first term was over and I dropped out of school for a while. For what? I don't know. I guess I thought I was missing something, but in reality I wasn't missing anything but an education.

I moved out of my mom's and into my uncle's house for the rest of the year. I began hanging out with the fellas, going to parties and getting drunk, looking for girls, and staying out late. I did this all through the summer until school started again. Finally I couldn't take it anymore. I realized I needed my diploma. I moved away from my uncle's and into my grandma's home to get some help with my education.

I enrolled at Metro High School again. This time Mary Wilcynski, our principal, made me wait a week to register to see if I really did want to attend the twelfth grade one more time. This time I got my act together.

Education has played a major role in my life. I took it seriously at first. Later I started to slack off and finally I got back on track with the help of two sweet and kind teachers at Metro, and the greatest woman of all, my grandmother.

My grandma is the spirit in my life right now and when I get my diploma, **she** deserves it. She has gotten me up every morning to come to school and made sure I attended classes. My advisor, Pat Martin, has played a major role in my life. Since I've been at Metro, she has stayed on me through thick and thin to help me through school and help me get my diploma. I want to say, "Thank you, Pat Martin." Another teacher I would like to thank is Marge Stell, my art teacher. Marge made me like art even though I hated it. I learned a lot in her art classes and I owe a great deal of thanks to Marge.

People may talk good or bad about Metro, but they shouldn't say anything until they have attended Metro themselves. Metro not only has an excellent learning atmosphere, but it's also a place to meet friends and have fun.

I know now that education is important to me and to the rest of the world. There is no way to survive without education in this world.

David graduated from Metro on May 31,1990. He became an outstanding student. He is attending Kirkwood Community College to earn a degree in business administration and is the manager of a deli at Wal-Mart in Cedar Rapids.

The preceding is the result of a follow-up on David by Dr. Mary Wilcynski of Metro High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Alternative School Associations

Alternative educators across the United States and other countries are meeting together and forming organizations to lend support to each other. As a result, at least 17 states have formed statewide organizations and more are considering doing so. In addition, an organization of the associations and other interested members has been formed entitled the International Affiliation of Alternative Education Associations and Personnel. The International Affiliation is coordinated through the Iowa Association of Alternative Schools but leadership is shared by all states.

The Iowa Association can be contacted for copies of directories for state associations (Iowa Association of Alternative Education, METRO Alternative High School, 1712 7th Street, S.E., Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401). Anyone interested in alternative education is encouraged to join the International Affiliation. The guidelines for the organization are unique compared to most education organizations and are as follows:

Operational Structure

Each statewide alternative education association will identify at least one board member to assume responsibility for communication with other associations. In addition, each association will assume responsibility for at least one work task that will contribute to the common goals of the Affiliation. Financial obligations for work tasks such as mailings, phone, travel, and material purchases will also be assumed by the association upon acceptance of a work task.

Persons who are not members of existing associations and who do not have an association in their state can become part of the Affiliation under the same obligations as an association, i.e., assuming responsibility for tasks. Financial responsibility for tasks by independent members can be assumed by the

member or by member associations after approval by the associations or any other arrangements the member can organize.

No membership dues are required of associations or individual members. Volunteerism and responsibility to complete work tasks replaces normal dues expectations.

The affiliation will support the sponsorship of one national conference annually and schedule one or more business meetings at the national conference. The business meeting will be organized and chaired by the association or member responsible for the national workshop.

In addition to support for each other, alternative educators are forming associations to share information and resources. This kind of sharing of information on alternative education is also practiced by other major educational associations. Some of those organizations and associations are identified in the appendices of this publication.

Appendices

Organizations and Resources

References

Organizations and Resources

Center for the Study of Alternatives
Hofstra University
Hempstead, NY 11550

Sample publications:

- Why Encourage Schools of Educational Choice?
- Synthesis of Research on Schools of Choice
- The Effects of Choice on Students, Teachers, Community Members and Schools

Fine Print (Publication)
1852 Pinehurst
St. Paul, MN 55116

Holistic Education Review (Publication)
Box 1476
Greenfield, MA 01320

Changing Schools (Publication)
Box 11
Morrison, CO 80465

National Coalition of Alternative Schools
Schoolhouse Road
Summertown, TN 28483

(AERO) Alternative Education
Resource Organization
Roslyn Road
Roslyn Heights, NY 11577

Colorado Options in Education
N. Wadsworth, #127
Box 191
Lakewood, CO 80226

Sample publication:

- Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Starting A Public Alternative School and More

Strategic Options
James Henres
E. Colfax
Denver, CO 80203

Sample publication:

- Restructuring Education: Strategic Options Required for Excellence

Phi Delta Kappa
Education Foundation
Eighth and Union
Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402-0789

Sample publications:

- Alternative Schools in Action-*Fastback Series*
- Optional Alternative Schools-*Fastback Series*
- High Schools as Communities-Book

National Association of Secondary School Principals
Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091

Sample publications:

- Alternative Paths to the High School Diploma
- Alternatives in Public Education: Movement or Fad?

National Consortium on Alternatives for Youth At Risk, Inc.
17th Street, Suite 107
Sarasota, FL 34235

Wisconsin Vocational
Studies Center
University of Wisconsin, Madison
Ed. Sciences Bldg.
W. Johnson Street
Madison, WI 52706

Sample publication:

- Staying In—A Dropout Prevention Handbook for K-12

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Alternative Education is part of a series of dropout prevention research reports published by the National Dropout Prevention Center. Additional copies may be ordered. The Center has produced a variety of other products which can be helpful to those who work with at-risk youth.

To obtain a complete list of publications and prices call or write:

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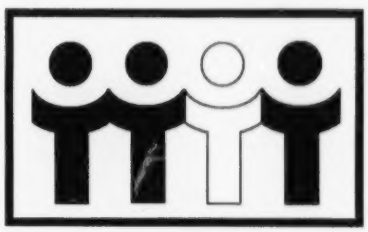

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